

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 14, 2018

The Honorable Robert Wilkie
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary Wilkie:

We write today to follow up on the implementation of the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) signed by both former VA Secretaries Robert McDonald and David Shulkin and partners in the Dayton, Ohio, community to establish the VA History, Research, and National Heritage Center in Dayton. The Dayton community, VA, and the Congressional delegation have been working to establish this center in historic buildings on the Dayton VA Medical Center campus for more than a decade and we hope VA will move quickly to follow through on the agreement.

The greater Dayton area has established an organization, which has made meaningful advancements towards raising capital for the project. Community signers of the MOA and others in Dayton have raised more than \$65,000 toward the project. We are further encouraged that the group has begun developing a start-up plan that includes plans for governance, financial oversight, strategic business processes, and stakeholder engagement processes. We applaud the community's collaborative efforts to implement the goals of the MOA in establishing a VA History Center Foundation Board, and to help identify and solicit donations to enable VA to accelerate the capital plan for the VA History Center.

Currently, VA rules dictate that before the community can make any significant progress on the MOA, critical administrative steps must be taken by VA. VA must draft organizational documents necessary to create the history office within VA, and then VA must create the Chief Historian position. As referenced in the MOA *The Happenstance History: Establishing a Central History Office at the Department of Veterans Affairs* states that, "the chief historian should be someone with a PhD in either history or public history, a record of publications, successful experience working in a federal bureaucracy, a background in applied history, and excellent oral and written communication skills."

Beginning this formal process ensures that the community's efforts are not reduced in scope, and that they can continue to prioritize funds essential for establishing the VA History Center. We respectfully request an update on VA's progress in implementing the administrative responsibilities outlined in the MOA to "create a new VA History Office at the VA Department level with funding to lead, advocate, and support a team of professional historians, archivists, and other experts, who will preserve VA history and historical collections."

We acknowledge the complexities involved in establishing a new office, and we appreciate the progress made thus far. The continued dialogue between the VA interagency team and the community group has been constructive, and we are hopeful that it will continue unabated. We emphasize that there has long been support for the history center from VA leadership, including Secretaries Shinseki, McDonald, and Shulkin. Likewise, during your nomination hearing on June 27 to be VA Secretary, you affirmed your

commitment to the MOA. We ask that you lend your strong support to these efforts. We look forward to hearing from you on the implementation of the MOA.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Sherrod Brown in blue ink.

Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

Handwritten signature of Rob Portman in blue ink.

Rob Portman
United States Senator

Handwritten signature of Michael R. Turner in blue ink.

Michael R. Turner
U.S. Representative

Handwritten signature of Warren Davidson in blue ink.

Warren Davidson
U.S. Representative